

THE END OF SERGEI EISENSTEIN

Case History of an Artist under Dictatorship

WACLAW SOLSKI

IN 1925 I was working for the Sovkino in Moscow, having come to Russia shortly before as an adviser on movie production for the foreign market.

One day three men came to my office. One was short, plump, with lively, piercing eyes, an unusually high forehead, and a great shock of hair. A strange, semi-sarcastic smile never left his face. His voice had an unpleasantly squeaky quality to it. Everything about him was roundish—his head, face, body, and even his arms and legs. This was my first meeting with Eisenstein.

With him was his ace cameraman, Edward Tissé, a Lett who had been a painter before he became one of the greatest living cameramen. The third guest was Eisenstein's assistant—now a film director in his own right—Gregor Aleksandrov, who had begun his movie-making career in a rather unusual fashion: he had been a circus tight-rope walker, and had a bad fall one night when Eisenstein, who was a great circus fan, happened to be in the audience. Moved by the accident, Eisenstein became interested in the young performer and from that time on they were inseparable friends.

WHEN Sergei Eisenstein died a year ago, the world lost one of the great innovators of the modern cinema, and the Soviet Union its most prominent movie director. His early movies, *Potemkin* and *Ten Days That Shook the World*, were something new in the art of the film: they have influenced, to one degree or another, every production made since. But the development of his career is also significant as testimony to the dismal fate of the artist in a totalitarian society. WACLAW SOLSKI knew Eisenstein well. He also has an intimate and expert acquaintance with Russian culture and Russian society. Mr. Solski has had nineteen books published in Europe—in Russian, Polish, German, and French; his plays have been produced in Paris, Brussels, and Prague.

"I UNDERSTAND that you're to pass on our films chosen for showing to the rotten bourgeoisie of the West," Eisenstein said, chuckling ironically. "What about my *Potemkin*? They won't understand it but they may like it. People sometimes like what they don't understand."

"Why do you think they won't understand it?" I asked.

"Because the Sovkino didn't understand it either," Eisenstein replied. "Did you see my *Potemkin*? I can assure you it is an excellent film, though its plot doesn't exactly adhere to the most recent political currents developing in this heaven-blessed land of ours."

I had only joined the Sovkino staff a few days before and didn't know anything about Eisenstein's film. He told me its story. *Potemkin*, later acknowledged by the whole world as one of the greatest films ever made, had been judged entirely worthless by the Sovkino Board at its first showing, and it was decided not to release it either in Russia or abroad. It was put in the so-called "morgue" along with other abortive pictures. Later, under Eisenstein's pressure, it was shown in one of the Moscow theaters, with hardly any publicity and with a very poor musical accompaniment (*Potemkin* was a silent movie). The showing was not a success, and after a very short run, the film was returned to the "morgue."

"Sovkino did everything to kill my film," Eisenstein added. "It is true that the public didn't like it very much, but that was because of the NEP.* The NEP-men would rather see half-naked girls on the screen than a

* The "New Economic Policy," introduced in Soviet Russia in 1921, relaxed restrictions on private enterprise in an effort to permit the country to recover after the ravages of the First World War and the civil war which followed.

serious film. But I'm not a NEP-man and I'm not interested in girls."

Gregor Aleksandrov suddenly burst into a short laugh, but quickly stopped and turned red. I couldn't see what he was laughing about. Not until later, when I learned what everyone in Moscow knew, did Aleksandrov's odd behavior become understandable to me.

I PROMISED Eisenstein to see *Potemkin*. This I did in a small sultry projection room at the Sovkino. The film was so badly glued together that it broke every few minutes. Perhaps that is why it did not make as great an impression on me then as it did later when I saw it in a regular theater. But even then, in that stuffy projection room, I felt that it was a major artistic triumph, that the director had introduced entirely new and revolutionary methods of montage and photography. I also understood Eisenstein's allusion to "new political currents."

In the movie field, the NEP was chiefly reflected by the all-out attempt to forget the sad past. Sovkino planned a large number of light comedies in the Hollywood style and also prepared some historical films quite different from *Potemkin*. It wanted to present Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, etc., in an "objective"—even, in those times, critical—light, but what it was really concerned with was to show the splendor of the old imperial courts, as a restorative for a people worn out by the rigors of revolution and civil war.

Vladimir Mayakovsky, the famous Soviet poet, saw *Potemkin* with me. His friend, the poet Assejev, had written the titles for it, and he was always loyal to his friends. Immediately after the showing, Mayakovsky and I went to see Sovkino's president, Konstantin Shvedshikov, a party man who once had hidden Lenin in his home before the Revolution. But this was long ago, and in 1925 Shvedshikov was a Soviet bureaucrat with pronounced bourgeois habits. He didn't know anything about movies, but he liked the products Hollywood sent to Moscow in hope of finding a Russian market. Sovkino

bought very few American films, but Shvedshikov used to spend hours enjoying them in his private projection room, and the more banal the movie, the better he liked it. He was also slightly anti-Semitic and he didn't like Eisenstein, whom, in private conversation, he used to call "The Nobleman of Jerusalem."

Mayakovsky took the floor first. He talked, as usual, in a thunderous voice, pounding the table with his fists and rapping on the floor with the heavy cane he always carried at that time. He demanded that Shvedshikov immediately export *Potemkin* and told him he would go down in history as a villain if he did not. Several times Shvedshikov tried to get a word in, but in vain. Nobody ever could say anything when Mayakovsky spoke. The climax of his speech was rather dramatic. Having finished, he turned to go.

"Are you through?" Shvedshikov asked. "If you are, I would like to say a few words myself."

Mayakovsky paused in the doorway and replied with great dignity: "I'm not through yet and I won't be for at least five hundred years to come. Shvedshikovs come and go, but art remains. Remember that!"

With that he left. I stayed behind and tried to argue with my boss in more reasonable terms, but in vain. It was only later, under the pressure of an ever-growing group of writers and journalists as well as some influential party men who liked the film, that Sovkino finally did agree to send *Potemkin* to Berlin.

A German composer, W. Meisel, wrote a special score for it, and its première in Berlin was a triumph. After this first success *Potemkin* was shown again in Moscow. This time the Soviet papers were full of Berlin reviews praising the picture and the public became so interested that its second Russian première had an overflow audience. Other triumphs followed. After *Potemkin's* American première in New York, Eisenstein was hailed as director of the best film ever made and he became world-famous almost overnight.

This writer cannot claim any credit for

helping to make this success possible. However, I am glad I at least tried to help Eisenstein, because this attempt was the beginning of a close acquaintance with one of the most interesting and most gifted men of our time.

SERGEI MIKHAILOVICH EISENSTEIN was born in St. Petersburg in 1898, the son of a prosperous ship-builder. He was a student at the St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) Institute of Civil Engineering when World War I broke out, and two years later went to the front as a private. After the Revolution, he remained in the army and organized amateur theatrical groups. Then he went to Moscow and soon became the chief set-designer for the Proletkult Theater, where he designed the sets for a great number of plays, most of them short propaganda pieces without any great artistic value.

The first play for which Eisenstein designed sets was entitled *Anti-Jesus*. The word "anti" was also used in the title of the Proletkult's next production, *Anti-Gas* (anti-poison gas). The public, however, soon became weary of "anti" propaganda pieces, and the Proletkult Theater began producing more serious plays: *Macbeth*, *Heartbreak House*, and *The Mexican* (based on a story by Jack London), for which Eisenstein also designed the sets.

In 1923, he not only designed, but also directed *Listen, Moscow*, which was written by Sergei Tretiakov, who was "liquidated" in the 1936-37 purges. It was a great success.

IT WAS at that time that Sovkino was organized in Moscow and the production of Soviet films began on a large scale. The legitimate stage had already become too confining for Eisenstein. He decided to make films, but he wanted to make them differently, dreaming of a camera "ranging through time and space." At the same time, he firmly believed that the making of a movie was primarily a mathematical problem that could and should be solved by mathematical methods. "I approach the making of a mo-

tion picture in much the same way that I would approach the installation of a water system," Eisenstein then declared. (Evelyn Gerstein's article in *Theatre Guild Magazine*, February 1930.) In an interview he said that he had three gods: Marx, Pavlov, and Freud. He even wanted to make Marx's *Das Kapital* into a motion picture.

I remember a talk with him a few years later; it must have been in 1926 or 1927. He was then re-reading everything Freud had written. Eisenstein was in an enthusiastic mood—the only mood, by the way, that made him temporarily drop his semi-ironical way of speaking. He told me that any one of Freud's volumes contained thousands of revolutionary film ideas and that he didn't see how one could make films or even write poetry without studying Freud.

"What about Pavlov?" I asked. "Do you still regard him as one of your three gods?"

"Of course I do," he answered, and told me about some interesting experiments based on Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflexes that he was then conducting at the Moscow Film Institute where he was a professor. He was just as enthusiastic about these as about Freud.

I remarked that Pavlov's theory could hardly be reconciled with Freud's. Our behavior, according to Freud, was to be explained by childhood events that had been relegated to the unconscious, but Pavlov had maintained that conditioned reflexes were *hereditary*; in other words, everything we do might be caused by some events connected, not with our own life, but with those of our ancestors.

But Eisenstein's train of thought had already gone elsewhere, and he began telling me about a talk he had had that day with a party man who criticized him because his films did not show the individual heroes of the Revolution, but only its masses. "I killed him with the text of the 'Internationale'," Eisenstein said. "Apparently he had never given a thought to it: 'Nobody will give us freedom, neither God, nor the czar, nor a hero'—that's what the 'Internationale' says. No hero! Besides, the worship of heroes, or

of any individuals whatever, has always seemed to me obscene, Asiatic, and immoral. I would never do it, never." A decade or so later Eisenstein was to produce *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*. But what he said at the time was undoubtedly completely sincere.

His first film was called *The Strike* and won him a prize at the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, but it had only an average success in Russia. The film dealt with a strike in a Russian factory before the Revolution; no professional actors were employed, all the parts being played by amateurs, most of them genuine workers who had actually taken part in real strikes in czarist Russia. The picture was uneven: some of its episodes were excellent, but in others it was obvious that Eisenstein was still groping for new methods. He was to find these in *Potemkin*, his next film production.

THE HISTORY of *Potemkin* started with Nina Agadjanova-Shutko's suggestion that Eisenstein make a film about the abortive Russian Revolution of 1905. As originally planned, the movie was to be composed of six separate episodes for release in 1925, the 20th anniversary of the 1905 revolution.

The mutiny of the cruiser *Potemkin's* sailors on the Black Sea was to be only one of the six episodes. Many scenes earmarked for the other parts were filmed first. But when Eisenstein began shooting scenes for the *Potemkin* episode in Odessa and Sevastopol, he decided that its material was so much the best that he would concentrate on it and expand it. And so he wrote a new script, eliminating all the other episodes.

Potemkin is probably the only film ever made that, after almost a quarter of a century, still makes as strong an impression as it did when first released. Almost all other old films now seem dated—not because of their plots, but because of their technique. Movie technique has made such great and rapid strides in the last twenty years that pictures tend to date very quickly. But the

technique of *Potemkin* was more than a quarter of a century ahead of its time.

Eisenstein's style was based on three main principles: montage, "dynamism," and what Eisenstein himself called "the synchronization of the senses." The creator of montage was Lev Kuleshov, who taught movie technique to both Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin. In his book on montage, Pudovkin wrote that no other director could be compared to Kuleshov. "We," he said, "are only making films: Kuleshov made the world's cinematography." Kuleshov gave as a classic demonstration of montage the fact that when a woman is shown on the screen, then a familiar view of Paris, followed by another shot of the woman, we automatically conclude that that woman must be in Paris—although actually she might have been photographed in Moscow. Thus montage can create new facts that never existed before. "Two film pieces of any kind," wrote Eisenstein, "placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept arising out of that juxtaposition." But these pieces "must be so selected from all the possible material that their juxtaposition shall evoke in the perception and feelings of the spectator the most complete image of the theme itself." (Sergei Eisenstein: *The Film Sense*, 1942.)

The principle of "dynamism" is a little more difficult to explain. "A work of art understood dynamically," wrote Eisenstein, "is just a process of arranging images in the feeling and mind of the spectator." This sounds innocent enough, but it isn't. To explain his idea, Eisenstein tells us first what an "image" is. For instance, a certain position of a clock's hands evokes in us the idea of the time of day. But sometimes, when too agitated or too preoccupied, we may look at the hands of a clock without reading the time from them. In this case the hands are only a "representation," not an "image," of time. It is not enough to see the hands—something has to happen to that perception before we realize what time it is. The process, as Eisenstein describes it, is this: a given order of hands on the dial provokes "representations" connected with this order. The

position of the hands on the clock at 5 PM will call up the subway rush hour, stores closing, etc., etc. The *image* of five o'clock is compounded of all these individual images, which constitute the full sequence of the process; but our mind "condenses" the process and, as a result, "the chain of intervening links falls away and an instantaneous connection is felt between the geometrical figure on the clock and our perception of the time." This is what takes place in our everyday life. But practice in life is different from practice in art. To achieve a similar result, art must "re-condense" the process, or, as Eisenstein puts it, "direct all the refinement of its methods to the process itself." Thus the spectator "is being drafted into the process as it occurs," instead of receiving "the represented result of a consummated process."

EISENSTEIN maintains that this "dynamic" principle applies to all the arts, even to painting. This is perhaps a little too far-reaching a claim, but there is no doubt that in movie-making the principle does work. This is true of all of Eisenstein's pictures, and especially of *Alexander Nevsky*. The battle on Lake Peipus in this film is shown through the medium of hundreds of details: pieces of ice, the gray sky with its tonality, the weapons of the German knights, and so forth.

When seeing the film, we "condense" all these images, we don't actually *see* them in the usual meaning of the word—and yet they evoke in us, as a final result, the feelings the creator of the film wanted to evoke. We witness the creation of an image and its connotations, rather than simply making use of the image as we do when we notice the time of day on a clock.

Eisenstein's third principle is the "synchronization of the senses," as opposed to "physical" or "technical" synchronization. When we see a gun firing and hear the explosion at the same time that is "physical" or "technical" synchronization. But it is also an "objective" synchronization. The artist, however, cannot be objective. He must look

at everything through the subjective prism of his own emotions. Between a "physical synchronization" and a "synchronization of the senses," as Eisenstein understands it, there is the same difference as that between a photograph of a person and the same person's portrait painted by an artist. The photograph may be the more exact likeness, but it can never influence our feelings, for only a work of art can radiate and evoke emotions. Thus, in film-making, it is entirely unnecessary—except for the spoken word—to have the image exactly correspond to the sound-track. On the contrary: the artist, disregarding "objective" reality, must organize the images and sounds in such a way that their blend can stimulate the desired emotions in the spectator.

Eisenstein once told me that shortly after *Potemkin* was shown in America, certain Hollywood producers placed metronomes in their studios because someone had told them that *Potemkin's* excellence was due to its having been shot "rhythmically." This was the height of nonsense and the metronomes of course had no effect whatsoever on these producers' pictures. Yet even the correct application of Eisenstein's theories would have helped Hollywood but little. Eisenstein was above all a great artist, and great artists are born, not made. His theories may help us understand how he made his films, but they could hardly teach us how to make them.

FOR A short period following the unparalleled success of *Potemkin*, Eisenstein was the happiest man in the world. He had proved the effectiveness of his theories and he had—or at least thought he had—the means at hand to create many more films that would be revolutionary in plot as well as in form. He was never a party Bolshevik—in fact, he never belonged to any political party—but he sincerely believed Russia was the only country in the world where the artist could work freely, listening only to the voice of his own conscience and disregarding the box office or the common denominators of public taste.

Three years later this dream castle crashed—with his next film, *October*.

October was shown in America under the title *Ten Days That Shook the World*. The title was taken from John Reed's famous book, which was one of the first sympathetic accounts of the actual events of the Bolshevik Revolution to reach English-speaking readers. (This book has long since been banned in Russia—Trotsky and many of the old Bolsheviks liquidated in the Moscow Trials are prominently mentioned, but there is not a word about Stalin.)

Eisenstein's *October* was not a screen version of Reed's book, and probably acquired its American title simply for publicity reasons, but Eisenstein certainly had used Reed's book, as well as other material. And he made an honest and a very beautiful film about the Russian Revolution. But only a few people have seen its original version.

Shortly after the film was completed, the Sovkino—in the person of the already mentioned Konstantin Shvedshikov—suggested that Eisenstein take Trotsky out of the film. Eisenstein refused. Although he didn't make his refusal public, everyone in the inner circles in Russia knew about it, and also knew that a few overly zealous young men were assigned to cut *October* against Eisenstein's will. The facts even became known in this country; a letter from Herman G. Weinberg in the *Modern Monthly* (July 1933) says:

"It is true that Eisenstein disavowed the mutilated form of *Ten Days That Shook the World* with the Trotsky episodes deleted. . . . *Ten Days* without the Trotsky episodes was meaningless as an historical document. This was enough to make Eisenstein disavow the emasculated version of his film."

But when his friends asked Eisenstein to disavow *October* publicly—which at that time was still possible in Soviet Russia—he could not bring himself to do it, and found his way out through compromise.

But a compromise with his own conscience is never easy for a great artist and almost always leaves scars. This is probably the reason why the film Eisenstein made after *October* was considerably weaker than

The Strike, *Potemkin*, or *October*. It was called *General Line* (shown in America as *The Old and the New*). The film dealt rather superficially with the changes the Revolution brought to the Russian villages, showing in loving detail new agricultural machines quite familiar to American audiences as well as to those of many other countries long before they became the symbol of revolution on the Russian countryside. The whole film dissolved into a long-winded paean to tractors, modern dairies, big cows, and vigorous bulls. But modern dairies and scientific agriculture in themselves have little in common with revolution as such, and the Soviet press pointed this out to Eisenstein. Some of the critics, acute enough to scent the fragrance of things to come, also attacked Eisenstein for his criticism of Soviet bureaucracy (*General Line* likens a typewriter in the office of some bureaucrat to a machine gun: millions of unnecessary words kill the efforts of the hard-working people of the villages).

Shortly afterwards, Eisenstein received an offer from Hollywood. The Soviet government did not oppose his going to America to accept it, probably being glad to get rid of him for the time being, since he had become a little too hot to handle. This was at the end of 1929.

EISENSTEIN came to Hollywood as a \$3,000-a-week man at Paramount, with a contract entitling him to choose his own stories. Several suggested to him by Paramount he rejected. Then he made his own suggestion: Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. The suggestion was accepted, but the script Eisenstein wrote wasn't. Other projects of his met with the same fate. He soon realized that it was no easier for him to make films in Hollywood than in Moscow: Moscow wanted him to produce films imbued with political tendencies that didn't appeal to him, while Hollywood demanded pictures without revolutionary ideas but with strong box-office appeal.

Eisenstein terminated his contract with Paramount and signed a new one with Up-

ton Sinclair, who organized a trusteeship called the Mexican Picture Trust, and sent him to Mexico, where he began *Que Viva Mexico!* a film dealing with the Mexican revolution of 1910.

For Eisenstein, the most important part of movie-making was montage. From the 200,000 feet of material he shot in Mexico, he had to select around 7,000 feet—which is the length of the average movie—for the final product. Just as Eisenstein began the montage work he was called back to Moscow and had to leave behind his uncompleted movie. The trusteeship offered the entire 200,000 feet of film he had shot to the Soviet government for \$100,000, but the Russians refused to buy. Finally, an American producer, Sol Lesser, acting on behalf of the Mexican Picture Trust and without Eisenstein's consent, put together a version of the movie that was shown under the name of *Thunder Over Mexico*. This version was not much good and it certainly bore no traces whatsoever of the ideas Eisenstein had intended to put into it. Many American writers and film men protested against this mutilated version, and an "International Defense Committee for Eisenstein's Mexican Film" was formed in New York with branches in the United States, Mexico, Cuba, and Europe. But all in vain; nothing could be done in the way of creating a more authentic version.

EISENSTEIN returned to Moscow in 1932 full of new ideas, resolved to keep aloof from inner-party conflicts and looking for some sort of neutral ground. While still in America he had suggested to Sovkino the screening of Ostrowski's classic play, *Enough Simplicity in Every Wise Man*, which he had once produced for the Proletkult Theater. The suggestion was enthusiastically accepted, but apparently only in order to entice Eisenstein back to Russia. Once he was back his idea was immediately rejected. And all his other proposals met the same fate, Sovkino rejecting them as fast as Hollywood had. On orders from above, the Soviet press began to attack Eisenstein, ac-

cusing him of individualism, of inability "to understand the historical meaning of the epoch," etc., etc. The idea was to make it clear to him that he was to do what he was told, or else nothing. Eisenstein was stubborn and pretended not to understand, so one day he was simply fired, and refused access to the Sovkino studios.

Eisenstein's "softening up" took all of five years, during which time he remained unemployed. By 1937 he was broken. According to some usually reliable sources, Stalin had a long talk with him, and immediately thereafter Eisenstein began work on a new film, *Alexander Nevsky*. One year later, in 1938, the film was released.

Alexander Nevsky deals with the Muscovite resistance to invasion by the Teutonic Knights of the Cross in 1242. It is a highly patriotic film, but its beauty is monumental, unimpassioned, and utterly cold. With this film, Eisenstein confirmed what he had once said about approaching the making of a movie in the same way as the installation of a water system. *Alexander Nevsky* is the magnificent work of a magnificent technician of art, but not of an artist. Just how brilliant a technician Eisenstein was, he showed in the great climactic scene of the film, the battle on Lake Peipus, which was "shot" in the middle of a hot Moscow summer, in a space scarcely 1,000 feet square. Yet on the screen this sequence appears to have been made in the dead of winter on a great frozen lake. Icy winds and snow flurries seem to beat down on the spectator from the screen. The sound track, with its "subjectively" exaggerated roaring of the wind, reinforces this impression. And there is also the superb musical score expressly written for the film by Prokofieff.

Alexander Nevsky was highly praised in the Soviet press. Eisenstein was awarded the Order of Lenin for it and later the Stalin Prize. In the opinion of the Kremlin, he was now "softened" enough to be given another and much more important task. In fact there are certain indications that *Alexander Nevsky* was merely a sort of preliminary test. Only after Eisenstein had successfully

passed it did Stalin consider him trustworthy enough to be given the most important political assignment of his life.

Eisenstein was now assigned the task of justifying Stalin's policies, particularly the Moscow Trials. This was to be done in an indirect, rather than a direct way, through the medium of a pseudo-historical film, *Ivan the Terrible*.

IVAN THE TERRIBLE played a very important part in Russian history. Everybody knows that he personally murdered his own son; that he had thousands of people tortured and slaughtered *en masse* at Novgorod; that he organized the first Russian secret police (Oprishniki), which extorted confessions by refined torture. Often, when Ivan could not sleep, he had victims brought to his palace and tortured to death simply for his own amusement.

And this is not all. Ivan in the film has only one true and close friend, Fedor Kolyshchev. This Kolyshchev had indeed existed, but he never played the role ascribed to him in the film, being in reality a figure of very minor historical importance. In the film, however, he betrays Ivan in the end and joins the opposition. Now it is widely known in Russia that Stalin had only one close personal friend, Avel Yenukidze. Yenukidze was a Georgian, an old Bolshevik who had known Stalin from boyhood and later worked with Stalin in Tiflis, where the latter had begun his political career. Later Yenukidze held important government and party posts and was for many years general secretary of the Supreme Soviet—the Russian “parliament.” Then, one day in 1937, it was briefly announced in the Soviet press that Avel Yenukidze had been executed for “treachery.” There was no trial; his crime was never explained more fully; and his name was never mentioned again in the Soviet press.

But most revealing of all in *Ivan the Terrible* is the film sequence dealing with Ivan's wife. As the movie has it, she was deeply devoted to him. One day she learned by accident of Andrei Kurbski's conspiracy

against her husband. For reasons not made very clear in the movie, she did not tell Ivan and was murdered later by Kurbski's men.

Russia's history does not give any warrant whatsoever to this story, but it strangely resembles the circumstances surrounding the sudden death of Stalin's own wife, Nadezda Alleluyeva, in 1932. According to rumors circulated at that time, she had committed suicide, but there were also rumors that she had been poisoned. But recently Pauline Labranche, a Frenchwoman who for many months tutored Stalin's daughter, Svetlana, published an article that perhaps solves the mystery. Svetlana, Nadezda's daughter, told the story to Madame Labranche herself, saying her mother had loved her father very much, had always worried about his health, and “*tasted everything that was cooked for him an hour before he ate it.*” (*Pageant*, April-May, 1948.)

Towards the end of the film, Ivan is shown as an ill, half-broken man. He had lost all his friends (they had been murdered on his own orders), he is alone, entirely alone. But he still believes in “the simple Russian people” who are not involved in conspiracies of any kind, and who do not belong to the boyars' class, like Andrei Kurbski and Ivan himself. One of these people, the peasant Basmanov, gives Ivan a piece of advice. “Surround thyself with new men,” he tells Ivan, “men who come from the lower depths and who will be indebted to thee for everything. Make of them an iron ring. Surround thyself with this ring and put sharp barbs into it, directed against thine and Russia's enemies.” Ivan's eyes light up: once again, he is ready to fight his and Russia's foes.

We know that Stalin himself has followed Basmanov's program pretty closely. But Eisenstein, for all his effort to carry out orders, could not help remaining an artist, and his film version of a “progressive,” “revolutionary” Ivan is enveloped in an atmosphere of dark, oppressive fear. It took some time for the men of the Kremlin to realize this. When the first part of *Ivan the Terrible* was shown in Moscow in January 1945, the film was highly praised in the official press.

However, a short time later Eisenstein suddenly found himself again under attack. He was accused of "advocating art for art's sake," of having failed to adhere to "contemporary realism," of being an "erroneous formalist," etc., etc.

It was quite evident that the Kremlin suspected him of having deliberately created the movie's heavy, almost unbearable atmosphere. Its second part was suppressed while the attacks in the press became even stronger. Following a long-established Soviet custom, Eisenstein promptly admitted that he had "permitted a distortion of historical facts" that made his film "bad and ideologically defective." He promised to do better, and began work on a new script. But his heart refused to carry the burden any longer and, on February 10, 1948, Sergei Eisenstein died.

EISENSTEIN was never arrested and never put on trial in Russia. But he must have lived under the constant fear of arrest, for he once described his own trial, jotting down on paper the following: "I am on trial and I look at the courtroom. The hall is crowded with people who know me—some casually, some very well. . . . I try to shrink by gazing at my feet. . . . Like blow upon blow fall the words of the prosecuting attorney's summing up. . . . My return from prison: the clang of the gates closing behind me as I am released. . . . The astonished stare of the servant girl when she sees me enter my old block. . . . There is a new name on the letter box. . . . My door is closed in my face by the former acquaintances who now occupy my apartment. . . . I turn back. . . . The hurriedly raised collar of a passer-by who recognizes me. . . ." (*The Film Sense*.)

Eisenstein prudently added that the above was merely an example of how a film story should be written. But reading this tragic

sample of double talk now, I cannot help remembering Sergei Eisenstein's sarcastic smile. It even seemed for a moment that I was again hearing his voice, with its always half-serious, half-ironical tone.

Once at a party, in his Moscow apartment, I examined photographs stuck on the walls. One showed a group of people photographed from a considerable height. Next to it were two photographs of the same woman, one depicting her laughter, the other with her face contorted in tears. I asked Eisenstein what these pictures meant.

"It is very simple," he said with a chuckle. "Here you can see a few people. There is a man among them who perhaps has a mistress . . . or maybe a wife he's in love with—who knows? And here is a girl—maybe a nice girl who loves flowers and such things. And others . . . quite ordinary people, I guess. But when you look at them from the height of a rock, they all seem very small, very unimportant, in fact, *they hardly exist*. Now, the other photographs are a little more difficult to explain. The woman laughs, and then she cries. But the basic expression of her face in both cases is almost the same. Why? Well, I don't know why. Maybe because it is caused by the convulsion of the same muscles. Or maybe because, after all, there is not such a big difference between laughter and tears, revolution and counter-revolution, an admiral and a rear-admiral—who is called, as you know, a *contre-admiral*, in Russian. . . ."

"There's certainly no difference between an admiral and a *contre-admiral*," someone remarked. "The admiral is simply a *contre-admiral*, or so I think."

"Is he?" Eisenstein asked. "Well, maybe he is, but he doesn't know it. Or does he?"

It wasn't healthy to carry on such a conversation in Moscow. Someone quickly changed the subject.